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ABSTRACT

Experiences that have been gained in Illinois in efforts to achieve interinstitutional coordination and cooperation among colleges and universities are described. Attention is directed to the role of the Illinois Master Plan Phase III to establish an integrated incentives in cooperative programs, experiences in the operation of an incentive grant program (Higher Education Cooperation Act--HECA), and other dimensions of interinstitutional cooperation and coordination. The HECA grant program is the most visible symbol of interinstitutional coordination and cooperation in Illinois. HECA grants have been provided for three basic kinds of activities: (1) to finance not-for-profit corporations or consortia that bring together several institutions to provide educational programs in underserved areas of the state; (2) short-term experimental programs; and (3) support for programs of statewide significance that involve a number of institutions. The most common function of not-for-profit corporations is to offer graduate instruction in unserved communities with a sizeable population base. Grants for cooperative programs of statewide significance have included activities to develop educational television programs and delivery systems, and library resource sharing. Some advantages and disadvantages of the HECA grant activities are noted. Ongoing cooperative efforts also have been operating with little or no state involvement. The role of the state board in encouraging interinstitutional cooperation and the need for higher education institutions to achieve support for the entire enterprise, rather than for special interests, are addressed. (SW)

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STRATEGIES FOR INTERINSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION: THE EXPERIENCE IN ILLINOIS

A PRESENTATION TO THE
WINGSPREAD CONFERENCE ON SHARING RESOURCES:
A MAJOR STRATEGY FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
IN THE 80'S

March 1981

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HE 015 113

by

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The usefulness and importance of interinstitutional cooperation have been discussed earlier in this conference. In my remarks I will comment on the experience that has been gained in Illinois in efforts to achieve interinstitutional coordination and cooperation.

The Role of Master Plan Phase III

Interinstitutional cooperation was the primary theme of Master Plan Phase III of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, passed in 1971. This Master Plan carried the subtitle "An Integrated State System." Its number one recommendation was to work to "establish an integrated system for Illinois higher education, public and private, to ensure the maximum utilization of the resources of both."

The Master Plan proposed the development of a Collegiate Common Market as a principal means of achieving this objective in Illinois. The possible activities proposed for the Collegiate Common Market included:

Distinguished professorships with lectures on all campuses;
Faculty rotation plan for academic terms;
Part-time faculty among cooperating colleges;
Interlibrary loan plan;
Audiovisual pool and closed circuit television;
Intercollegiate class attendance privileges;
Major-facilities sharing;
Intercampus transportation;
Intercollegiate tours abroad;
Community Cultural and Enrichment Program;
Married-student villages;
Central intercampus health clinic;
Joint purchase and use of scientific equipment;
Student-teacher practice-training placement;
Common student health and accident insurance;
Common faculty-staff insurance;
Cooperative purchasing;
Cooperative graduate programs;
Trustee seminars and education;
Computers and data processing;
Contractual interchange for program offerings;
Intercampus special events.

To make a long and interesting story shorter, let me say simply that the ambitious (some said grandiose and outrageous) reach of Master Plan Phase III far exceeded its grasp. The Master Plan was read by some as an effort in the name of cooperation to subordinate all of higher education in Illinois to an overly zealous coordinating board. Barrels of ink were spilled and countless hours were consumed in discussing, promoting, and denouncing the Plan.

It is probably accurate to say that the Master Plan was insensitive to the importance and usefulness of institutional identity, self-image, and self-esteem. It may even be accurate to say that the Master Plan reflected overly ambitious empire-building. But despite its excesses, Master Plan Phase III has helped create what I believe is an effective program of interinstitutional cooperation in Illinois.

The state level program to support interinstitutional cooperation that resulted from the Master Plan is modestly financed, as I believe it should be in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. Although this program is much more modest than the Collegiate Common Market conceived by the Master Plan, I think the Master Plan has resulted in a positive mind-set toward interinstitutional cooperation in Illinois that has an effect far greater than the direct results of our formal program.

The Master Plan also resulted in the creation of a community college district that embodies in a very real way the concept of an educational common market on a regional scale. John Wood Community College in Quincy, Illinois is a publicly created and supported institution that offers the greatest part of its instructional program through contracts with private and proprietary institutions in Quincy and nearby communities. It has been an effective means of achieving the expansion of educational opportunities to students through the use of existing institutions in a cooperative program.

The Role of Financial Incentives in Cooperative Programs

Before turning to a discussion of specific programs in Illinois, I'd like to make a few general comments on the dynamics of interinstitutional cooperation. It's obvious that a clear understanding of common interest is needed before cooperation between two or more parties can be achieved. Accordingly, developing an effective strategy for achieving coordinated, cooperative action requires some careful thinking about positive and negative incentives.

One positive incentive we all understand is money, and it's fairly easy to achieve cooperation if it is handsomely

rewarded with dollars. Inducing institutions to pay the costs of cooperative programs from their own resources is obviously a greater challenge. But the importance of meeting this challenge should not be underestimated. The balance between the benefits and costs of cooperative activities is sharply reduced to the extent that external support is required to achieve cooperation. The percentage of external support for an activity should be as small as possible, particularly if cooperation is sought at fundamental levels of the institution. If cooperative activity is peripheral to the core of an institution, it will disappear when it is no longer propped up by external dollars. One of the challenges facing agencies that seek to achieve interinstitutional cooperation is to be sure that financial incentives stimulate, not underwrite, cooperative activity.

This is not to say, however, that providing financial incentives is an ineffective means of achieving cooperation. In 1972, as a result of Master Plan Phase III, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Higher Education Cooperation Act, which authorizes a program of interinstitutional grants for cooperative activity. The obvious strategy of this program is to provide financial incentives for cooperation. In order to receive a grant institutions must agree to establish a cooperative program. I think it is a testimony to the inherent benefits of interinstitutional cooperation that institutions have sometimes gone to great lengths in order to obtain a small grant.

Another possible reason for the effectiveness of small grants may be related to the positive public relations value of participating in a cooperative effort that is blessed and supported by the State of Illinois. We have had cases where a trivial amount of State resources seems to have played an important role in establishing a significant cooperative activity among institutions. This is not to say, however, that institutions will turn down a large grant if it is offered for a cooperative program.

In fact, we have encountered efforts to "liberate" a program from existing organizational structures by seeking external grants for cooperative efforts. As we all know quite well, it is common for competing interests within an institution to seek autonomy through the endorsement and support of an external agency. Cooperative grant programs that become a pawn in these activities are self-defeating.

Experiences in the Operation of an Incentive Grant Program

During the past eight years the Higher Education Cooperation Act (HECA) has been used to stimulate and finance in

part a number of interinstitutional cooperative programs in Illinois. In the next few minutes I will describe the types of programs that have been financed with HECA grants and some of the positive and less positive experiences we have had through the operation of this program.

HECA grants have been provided for three basic kinds of activities. The first of these categories of grants has been used to finance not-for-profit corporations or consortia which bring together several institutions, public and private, to provide educational programs in underserved areas of the State. Although these organizations provide a variety of functions, the most common function is to offer graduate instruction in communities with a sizeable population base in which there is no graduate level institution.

In the Quad Cities, a population center on the Illinois-Iowa border, an administrative structure has been developed that is partially financed by both the State of Iowa and the State of Illinois to coordinate graduate courses offered by a number of institutions in both states. The annual support from the State of Illinois for this program is approximately $100,000; its total budget is about six times that large. Similar programs on a smaller scale have also been established on a continuing basis in other regions of the State.

The positive aspects of such programs are that they meet genuine educational needs at a minimal cost. Establishing such centers is far less costly than creating graduate level institutions in these communities. In addition, these centers are quite flexible in terms of program offerings and do a better job of responding to changing student demands than most institutions can.

On the negative side, such continuously funded cooperative projects can become institutionalized. Projects that are well conceived but poorly executed or projects that start well and then deteriorate may be difficult to phase out once they have been established for several years. Theoretically, external funding for these projects could be and possibly should be phased out after they are well established. As a practical matter, however, continuing external funding for the "overhead" expenses of a cooperative venture is often necessary. There is no question, however, that external grant funds should be a relatively small component of the total resources involved in such projects. Currently the State of Illinois commits approximately $400,000 per year to these continuing cooperative efforts; since 1973 a total of about $2.7 million has been used for this purpose.

The second major category of HECA grants in Illinois has been for short-term experimental programs. These grants are

typically quite small and usually provide start-up costs for an experimental program that is intended to be continued, if successful, with support from other sources. Such grants have been used for faculty exchanges, the cooperative development of instructional materials, to facilitate articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions, and to develop cooperative cultural programs involving several institutions. Currently approximately $300,000 are allocated for such grants annually, and $1.2 million have been used for this purpose since the program began.

The third major category of HECA funded programs is efforts to support programs of statewide significance which involve a number of institutions. Such grants have included efforts to develop educational television programs and delivery systems, to reduce the cost of supporting academic computing services by establishing a cooperative computing center, to increase the number of qualified minority applicants for health professions education, and to implement a statewide system of library resource sharing. As in other areas, I believe we have achieved some notable successes with such grants, but there have been less successful programs as well.

One of the most successful efforts has been the recent implementation of a statewide library resource sharing network. Through HECA grant funds the shelf lists of libraries at institutions all across the State have been computerized and stored in a central computer at the University of Illinois. Individuals at any participating institution can search for a particular volume on the shelves of all other participating institutions. When the desired volume is found, it can be delivered to the individual seeking it within 24 to 48 hours through a delivery service that travels daily from institution to institution.

The system is also used to monitor circulation for each of the participating libraries. Because statistics on the circulation of individual volumes are maintained in the system, the utilization of library storage and library resources on the individual campus are enhanced.

In effect, this system has expanded the resources of each institutional library to include the entire State. Institutions are better able to monitor their own library circulation and acquisition policies, and they are able to avoid significant costs incurred through the purchase, storage, and handling of seldom-used volumes. This system is playing a critically important role in helping Illinois institutions to cope with the tremendous cost increases we have seen for library materials.

Another successful program in this category has been the development of a cooperative academic computing center involving a number of public universities. For several years this program was totally funded with a HECA grant. After it became well established, the funds for the operation of the program were transferred to institutional budgets and a chargeback system for services rendered was implemented.

Although the decision to go to a chargeback system resulted in feelings of insecurity on the part of those managing the cooperative computing center, I believe it has been a healthy decision for both the activity and the cooperative program as a whole. The potential that institutions may reallocate resources from the shared computing network provides an incentive for the cooperative computer center to achieve effective levels of service. Although some institutions have reduced their utilization of the facility, others have been eager to increase their allocation of resources to it because it has continued to meet their needs.

In another case, educational television, the cooperative grant program has been less successful. Decision makers in the State of Illinois have been ambivalent about the implementation of educational television for nearly 20 years. In some cases the momentum for establishing regional or statewide educational television operations has been lost when technological advances made proposals obsolete. In other cases the level of commitment to educational television at both the institutional level and among State decision makers has simply not been strong enough to overcome the inevitable problems that are encountered in efforts to begin a new enterprise.

There is always a danger that a cooperative proposal is a stepchild; a program that is moderately desirable to a number of people but not sufficiently important to outweigh other priorities. There is little likelihood of long-term success when funding for cooperative programs is allocated to such ventures. The tendency of cooperative grant programs to attract "stepchildren" is one of the reasons I believe a modestly funded program is more likely to be successful. If resources are limited, there is a strong incentive to fund only the most promising projects and to terminate projects that have not fulfilled their intended purpose.

Other Dimensions of Interinstitutional Cooperation and Coordination

Although the HECA grant program is the most visible symbol of interinstitutional coordination and cooperation in Illinois, it represents only a small segment of established

and ongoing cooperative efforts. The more effective utilization of resources through interinstitutional coordination and cooperation is a theme that has influenced a variety of Board of Higher Education actions. In addition, the natural forces that make interinstitutional cooperation rational for institutions have resulted in a variety of programs that occur with little or no State involvement.

The program approval and review function of the Board of Higher Education is an important area through which the cooperative use of resources can be achieved. The Board has been able to provide a powerful incentive for interinstitutional cooperation simply by refusing to approve the establishment of programs that would duplicate existing resources. One of the most important criteria for the approval of any new program is that the proposal takes full advantage of all opportunities to reduce cost through cooperative efforts.

The role that a state board can play in encouraging interinstitutional cooperation was clearly demonstrated in a recent case. A college proposed establishing a free-standing nursing program totally under its own control. Because a local hospital now has a diploma nursing program, the community college's proposal seemed at odds with the Board's commitment to avoid the duplication of existing resources. It's fairly clear that, if the college establishes a free-standing nursing program, the diploma nursing program will not survive. The facts also suggested that the diploma program is not currently meeting the need for nursing education in the region.

The Board of Higher Education became involved in this issue because the two sides could not get together. Both hoped that the Board would support their position to the detriment of the other party. Although it is possible that the Board will ultimately be forced to choose one side or the other, the hospital and the college have been requested to resume negotiations with the clear understanding that the Board seeks a cooperative program.

Finally, the importance of interinstitutional coordination and cooperation extends beyond joint instructional, research, or public service activities. In the 1980's it is fairly clear that higher education will not command the political resources that resulted in increasing public support during the 1950's and 1960's. I am convinced that the most effective political strategy for higher education during a period of declining enrollments is to join forces in a coordinated effort to achieve support for the entire enterprise, not support for special interests within higher education. In effect, I am suggesting that all of us in higher education circle the wagons and shoot out, rather than shoot in, as has often been our practice.

It's difficult to achieve this kind of interinstitutional cooperation with a grant; I can't imagine a grant that would be large enough. We are trying, however, to increase the awareness of higher education's common interests through informal gatherings of the leadership of various sectors and constant reference to the importance of hanging together in troubled times. It's too early to say how successful this effort might be, but there is no question in my mind that the successes we have had with smaller interinstitutional cooperative projects will be helpful as we seek to achieve cooperation on a broader scale.